

Rep. Lofgren Responds to Vietnamese Deportation Agreement

Washington, D.C. - Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-San Jose) recently authored a letter, cosigned by Representatives Dennis A. Cardoza (D-CA), Jim Costa (D-CA), Lincoln Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Keith Ellison (D-MN), Al Green (D-TX), Mike Honda (D-CA), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Ed Perlmutter (D-CO), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Linda Sanchez (D-CA), Loretta L. Sanchez (D-CA), strongly questioning the Bush administration's decision to sign a repatriation agreement with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The complete text of the letter is below:

January 23, 2008

The Honorable Michael Chertoff

Secretary

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

We are extremely concerned that thousands of Vietnamese nationals currently living in the United States may be forcibly returned to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, a country with an extensive and continuing record of human rights violations. It is appalling and unbelievable that this Administration would even consider returning those who escaped Communism back to the clutches of the very Communists that they escaped.

According to an ICE press release, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the government of Vietnam today. This MOU will apparently permit the deportation of Vietnamese nationals who entered the United States on or after July 12, 1995.

In the 2006 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, the U.S. State Department described the human rights situation in Vietnam as "unsatisfactory". The March 6, 2007 report documented a litany of human rights violations, including:

- Abuses by government officials for exercise of religious freedom;
- Prohibition of political opposition movements;

- Arbitrary arrest and detention for political activities;
- Governmental control over the press and the internet;
- Abuse of suspects during arrest, detention, and interrogation;
- Denial of fair and expeditious trials;
- Limitation of citizens' privacy rights and freedom of speech, press, assembly, movement, and association;
- Prohibition of independent human rights organizations;
- Violence and discrimination against women, including limited child prostitution and trafficking in women and children;
- Societal discrimination of some ethnic minority groups; and
- Limitation of workers' rights, especially to organize independently.

Likewise, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported that "Vietnam has initiated a severe crackdown on human rights defenders and advocates for the freedoms of speech, association, and assembly, including many religious leaders." In particular, USCIRF found that "[t]he Vietnamese government continues to remain suspicious of ethnic minority religious groups, such as Montagnard and Hmong Protestants and Khmer Buddhists; those who seek to establish independent religious organizations, such as the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Hao Hoa, and Cao Dai; and those it considers to pose a threat to national solidarity or security, such as 'Dega' Protestants and individual Mennonite, Catholic, Buddhist, and house church Protestant leaders."

In addition, respected non-governmental entities such as Amnesty International also documented wide-spread human rights violations in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam:

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Restrictions on freedom of expression and association continued. Members of unauthorized churches seen as opposing state policies faced harassment. Dissidents using the Internet were harassed, threatened and imprisoned. Small groups of ethnic minority Montagnards continued to flee human rights violations in the Central Highlands and seek asylum in neighbouring Cambodia; at least 250 remained imprisoned after unfair trials in Viet Nam.

Given the rampant violations of human rights committed by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as documented by our own State Department and other governmental and non-governmental experts, we are very troubled that ICE has entered into an agreement to deport Vietnamese nationals living in the United States into such conditions. We ask that you brief us personally on the MOU. In particular, we would like to know the process by which the agreement was reached, including whether ICE was aware of and considered the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's human rights record in reaching the agreement. Furthermore, we insist that no implementation of this agreement take place until agreed to by Congress. We would appreciate your response no later than close of business on Friday, January 25, 2008.

Sincerely,

Zoe Lofgren

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

Michael Honda

Lincoln Diaz-Balart

Loretta Sanchez

Mario Diaz-Balart

Linda Sanchez

Keith Ellison

Jim Costa

Dennis Cardoza

Ed Perlmutter

Al Green

Barbara Lee

Jim Costa

cc: Secretary Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Department of State

Assistant Secretary Julie Myers, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren is serving her seventh term in Congress representing most of the City of San Jose and Santa Clara County. She serves as Chair of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law. She also Chairs the House Administration Subcommittee on Elections and serves on the House Homeland Security Committee. Congresswoman Lofgren is Chair of the California Democratic Congressional Delegation consisting of 34 Democratic members of the U.S. House of Representatives from California.